

The ‘Butner Study’ Redux: A Report of the Incidence of Hands-on Child Victimization by Child Pornography Offenders

Michael L. Bourke · Andres E. Hernandez

Published online: 10 December 2008
© Springer Science + Business Media, LLC 2008

Abstract This study compared two groups of child pornography offenders participating in a voluntary treatment program: men whose known sexual offense history at the time of judicial sentencing involved the possession, receipt, or distribution of child abuse images, but did not include any “hands-on” sexual abuse; and men convicted of similar offenses who had documented histories of hands-on sexual offending against at least one child victim. The goal was to determine whether the former group of offenders were “merely” collectors of child pornography at little risk for engaging in hands-on sexual offenses, or if they were contact sex offenders whose criminal sexual behavior involving children, with the exception of Internet crimes, went undetected. Our findings show that the Internet offenders in our sample were significantly more likely than not to have sexually abused a child via a hands-on act. They also indicate that the offenders who abused children were likely to have offended against multiple victims, and that the incidence of “crossover” by gender and age is high.

Keywords Child pornography · Internet offender · Online offender · Butner Study · Hands-on abuse

Opinions expressed in this article on those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the US Marshals Service, or the US Department of Justice.

M. L. Bourke (✉)
US Marshals Service,
241 18th Street/CS-4, Suite 1200,
Washington, DC 20530, USA
e-mail: Michael.Bourke2@usdoj.gov

A. E. Hernandez
Psychology Services, Federal Correctional Institution,
Butner, NC, USA

In recent years, the increased use of the Internet has been accompanied by an exponential rise in cybercriminality, including crimes involving the sexual exploitation of children. This has been a focus of a growing number of studies (e.g., Cooper et al. 2000; Durkin 1997; Durkin and Bryant 1999; Galbreath et al. 2002; Lanning and Burgess 1989; McCabe 2000; Seto et al. 2006; Taylor and Quayle 2003; Wolak et al. 2004). According to congressional testimony by Ernie Allen, President and CEO of The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the online enticement of children has increased by more than 400% since 1998 (Sexual Exploitation 2006). Such increases in Internet-based predation are consistent with the rise in other forms of online exploitation, such as downloading, possessing, and trading/distributing child pornography. This criminal trend is at least partially attributable to the increasing availability of computers, and the ease with which individuals now gain unrestricted access to the Internet. As Mr. Allen noted in his testimony, ever-evolving technologies, including webcams, social networking websites, and Internet-accessible cellular telephones, facilitate online illegal activity (Sexual Exploitation 2006). These innovations, as well as such online resources as peer-to-peer networks and Fservices, allow the transmission of illegal material to move faster, and in significantly greater quantities, than ever before. They also allow predatory offenders to electronically creep into the bedrooms of our nation’s youth, where they engage in sexually explicit “chat,” “cybervoyeurism” (using the child’s webcam to view him or her in a state of undress or engaged in sexual activity), and “cyberexhibitionism” (displaying their genitals, via the Internet, to a minor).

Technological innovations also have enabled offenders to utilize complex methods for avoiding detection by law enforcement. Such methods include using software to erase

electronic “footprints,” surreptitiously gaining access to wireless networks to download pornographic material, finding secretive locations for data storage (e.g., wrist-watches, MP3 players, videogame consoles), and utilizing hardware to “bypass” a computer’s hard drive with the intention of obscuring certain activities from computer records.

Although these attempts to outwit and evade detection are an ongoing challenge for law enforcement officials, arrests for online criminality also have increased at an exponential rate. The FBI’s Innocent Images Initiative, for example, reported an increase of 2,026% cases opened, and a 1,312% increase in convictions or pretrial diversions, between 1996 and 2005 (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2006, p. 6). This rise is due to the increased presence of law enforcement online; the formation of multi-jurisdictional Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Forces; better education and training for investigators, probation/parole officials, and members of the judiciary; and new legislation designed to help prosecutors keep up with the dynamic methodologies used by online offenders to obtain and distribute illegal material. Despite these efforts, however, offenders continue to access illicit material and engage in online predatory behavior with perceived anonymity, a problem that has been highlighted by the news media (e.g., the “To Catch a Predator” series on *Dateline NBC*).

The scope of this problem is worldwide and it is driven, in part, by the fact that child pornography is a lucrative commodity. As Mr. Allen testified, “Child pornography has become a global crisis. A recent report by McKinsey Worldwide estimated that today commercial child pornography is a \$20 billion industry worldwide, fueled by the Internet” (Sexual Exploitation 2006, p. 6). Yet, despite international attention and collaboration, it is an unfortunate fact that we know less about online child pornographers than many other types of offenders. Even the degree to which they are similar to “pre-Internet era” child pornographers, who often were identified and apprehended using more conventional methods of criminal investigation (e.g., the interception of illegal material at airports or mail facilities), is unknown.

The dearth of empirical knowledge about this population not only has challenged law enforcement and criminal justice officials, but also has hampered mental health professionals. For example, at the present time, there are no evidence-based protocols to guide the assessment and treatment of these offenders. Thus, mental health professionals are forced to rely on their best clinical judgment when making decisions about risk classification and management, diagnosis, and treatment methodology. Unfortunately, this often includes extrapolating from assessment and treatment techniques that were developed and

validated for use with other types of offenders, such as substance abusers. In response to the demand for additional information about online child pornographers, the intention of the current paper is to shed an empirical light on a segment of this growing population.

A particular challenge for mental health providers relates to the numerous cognitive distortions evidenced by child pornography offenders, and the need to discern these thinking errors from legitimate causal or contributing explanations for their behavior. While the phenomenon of cognitive distortions has been the subject of considerable research (e.g., Abel et al. 1989; Abel et al. 1985; Bumby 1996; Carich and Calder 2003; Quinsey 1986; Ward et al. 1995), and is well-known to professionals who evaluate and treat “traditional” sex offenders (e.g., child molesters, exhibitionists, rapists), considerably less is known about thinking errors utilized by child pornography offenders. Some researchers, notably Taylor and Quayle (2003), studied child pornography offenders and have concluded that cognitive distortions and fantasy play an important role in their offending behavior. These thinking errors serve to minimize the offenders’ guilt and facilitate “disowning behaviors” which Carich and Calder (2003) define as any behavior that “enables the individual to evade and avoid responsibility [and] . . . play[s] a significant role in the offending process” (p. 122). For example, following their apprehension, some child pornography offenders attempt to persuade law enforcement officials, treatment providers, and members of the judiciary that they discovered child pornography sites inadvertently. They deny they ever sought deviant material, and instead claim that strangers emailed them child abuse images, unsolicited. Despite their claims of unintentional involvement, these offenders are unable to convincingly articulate a reason why someone would distribute illegal material to unknown persons, an act we equate to someone mailing bags of cocaine to random addresses, just in case the recipient might be interested, and while ignoring the possibility that the addressee may be a law enforcement officer. Other offenders claim they unwittingly followed links that mysteriously appeared in “pop-up” windows. They may further assert that after they followed the metaphoric White Rabbit down this rabbit-hole, they found themselves suddenly and inexplicably afflicted with a previously nonexistent desire for this type of highly deviant, illegal, and morally repugnant material. They claim they became “caught up” and subsequently “addicted” to these images. Still others assert that their behavior is attributable to an underlying mood or anxiety disorder (e.g., Bipolar Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder), a misguided attempt to “work through” their own childhood victimization, or online investigative vigilantism.

While it is indisputable that certain factors (e.g., psychiatric disorders, developmental and psychological

vulnerabilities) influence criminality, the influence of these factors on child pornography offenders is unknown. Based on our clinical observations, however, only a very small minority of offenders (e.g., psychopaths) who commit child pornography crimes are motivated by non-sexually deviant interests; rather, most are motivated by a pre-existing sexual interest in minors. In our work with hundreds of Internet child pornography offenders in treatment, the vast majority of those who initially denied paraphilic interest subsequently acknowledged their pre-existing and longstanding sexual interest in minors. Similarly, the vast majority of child molesters are motivated by an established sexual interest in children (Abel and Harlow 2001).

Among child pornography offenders, the comorbidity of contact sexual criminality is significant (Wolak et al. 2005). This issue initially was raised in November, 2000 by one of the current authors (AEH), who presented a poster at the 19th annual conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA). This poster presentation, which subsequently has been referred to as the “Butner Study,” was based on a review of (1) official records, and (2) the self-report of incarcerated sex offenders. Specifically, it described differences between the number of hands-on victims that were known at the time of sentencing (per the official Presentence Investigation Report [PSIR]), and the number of victims the offenders subsequently revealed to treatment providers during their participation in a prison-based sex offender treatment program (SOTP). Based on the PSIRs, the combined group of 62 child pornography and interstate travel offenders perpetrated contact sexual crimes against 55 victims. After participation in the treatment program, these offenders reported perpetrating contact sexual crimes against an additional 1,379 victims.

The ATSA presentation highlighted the finding that a substantial percentage of men in treatment at Butner who claimed to be at “low risk” of harm to children because they exclusively collected child abuse images and allegedly never molested a child, subsequently indicated that, in fact, they had committed acts of undetected child sexual abuse. In addition to challenging the “curiosity” argument described above, the findings called into question several other assertions; for example, that defendants download and view child abuse images *instead of* sexually abusing children, and that they are at low risk of harm to children because their deviant sexual behavior involves “just pictures,” with the parenthetical assumption that this activity is discrete and has little to no correlation with hands-on offending.

The ATSA poster presentation described heuristic observations, and was intended to be an informative, but preliminary, examination of this subject. The current study, while similarly exploratory and not necessarily representative of the entire population of child pornographers, utilizes

a larger sample and employs more rigorous research methodology. For this study, we conducted two analyses. In the first, which is basically a replication of the Hernandez (2000) study described above, we compared criminal sexual histories known at the time of sentencing with the self-report of offenders following participation in treatment for the purpose of determining how many of the so-called “just pictures” offenders self-reported contact sex offenses. Additionally, we explored the issue of “cross-over,” a term English et al. (2000) use “to describe the fact that many adult sex offenders have a history of victimizing across genders and age categories” (p. 31). We tested our hypothesis that, consistent with prior research on crossover (e.g., Abel et al. 1987; Ahlmeyer et al. 2000; Heil et al. 2003), a significant proportion of the hands-on abusers in our sample disclosed victims in various age groups and against victims of both genders.

Method

Participants

Subjects were 155 sexual offenders in an intensive, residential, sex offender-specific treatment program (SOTP) at a medium-security federal prison. Each of these offenders voluntarily participated in sex offender treatment at this facility. The program is approximately 18 months in duration and employs a cognitive-behavioral orientation. Inmates participate in approximately 15 hours per week of structured and unstructured therapeutic activities. Additionally, these offenders are immersed in a treatment milieu by virtue of their placement in a housing unit that is utilized solely for the treatment of SOTP inmates. Within this milieu, participants are expected to hold one another accountable and encourage taking responsibility for all their criminal acts. In addition to group and individual therapy, offenders participate in a 60-week psychoeducational series focusing on criminal thinking errors, management of deviant sexuality, emotional self-regulation, victim impact and empathy, social and intimacy skills, communication skills, relapse prevention, and community re-entry skills. Inmates participate in a comprehensive psychosexual evaluation that includes objective psychological tests, psychophysiological examination (polygraph), and phallographic assessment.

The large majority of subjects (95%) were Caucasian; three were Native American, three were African-American, one was Asian-American, and one was Hispanic. Ages ranged from 21 to 71 ($M=40.7$, $SD=11.54$). Participant level of education ranged from middle school to doctoral degrees; the mean and modal level of education was “some college.”

Subjects were selected from an initial pool of all SOTP participants whose instant offense involved child abuse images (e.g., Possession, Distribution, or Receipt of Child Pornography) and who completed or left treatment between October, 2002 and October, 2005. There were no subjects in this sample who were convicted of Production of Child Pornography. From the 201 offenders who met these criteria, 46 subjects were excluded because they did not participate in the SOTP for a minimum of 6 months due to voluntary withdrawal, expulsion, or death (one subject). We chose this six-month cutoff because offenders seldom disclose their entire sexual offense history upon initial participation in treatment programs. This resulted in a final subject pool of 155 child pornography offenders.

Measures

Presentence Investigation Report (PSIR) The PSIR contains criminal and social information used by the federal judiciary to determine appropriate sanctions to impose in federal criminal cases. In addition to psychosocial information, it includes a listing of known criminal arrests and convictions, descriptions of any sustained allegation of sexual misconduct (e.g., by a child protective services agency), and any other relevant information pertaining to the criminal offense history (e.g., admissions of misconduct made by the offender to investigating officers).

Psychosexual History Questionnaire (PHQ) The PHQ is an unpublished self-report measure on which offenders record demographic information and describe their developmental, psychosocial, criminal, and sexual histories. This includes a comprehensive assessment of their paraphilic disorders, their sexual offending behavior, and a complete listing of their human hands-on victims (i.e., their “Victims List”). The PHQ is administered upon admission to the SOTP, and is updated regularly (typically every 6 months) thereafter to record any changes (e.g., new disclosures) to the offender’s sexual offense history. The current study used the most recent PHQ update (i.e., the version last completed by the offender prior to his departure from the program).

Polygraph Examination Report SOTP program participants receive a voluntary sexual offense history (disclosure) polygraph examination after they complete at least 14 months of treatment. Exceptions include those whose treatment ends precipitously (e.g., expulsions, withdrawals). To date, no offender offered polygraph examination has declined to participate. In the current sample, 80 (52%) subjects participated in polygraph examination. These examinations are conducted in accordance with

federal practice standards and are administered by a qualified examiner. The Polygraph Examination Report is a listing of admissions made by the offender either before or after the administration of the examination.

Procedure

Contact Sexual Criminality Information regarding hands-on offenses known at the time of sentencing was obtained from each subject’s PSIR. A “hands-on offense” was defined as any fondling of the genitals or breasts over clothing, as well as skin-to-skin contact including hand-to-genital, genital-to-genital, mouth-to-genital, and genital-to-anus. Acts of frottage were not included. For purposes of this study, we used liberal criteria to determine if a subject was a known hands-on offender at the time of sentencing. To meet the definition, the subject had to have at least one of the following: 1) a previous conviction for a contact sexual offense; 2) an acknowledgment of a contact sexual offense by the offender, documented in the PSIR; or 3) evidence in the PSIR that at least one allegation of a contact sexual offense was investigated *and substantiated* by a child protective services agency.

Information regarding the number and type of hands-on offenses known at the end of treatment was obtained from the “Victims List,” a form included in the PHQ to systematically record data about each victim. To promote honest disclosure, offenders do not reveal any identifying information when listing their victims, and are encouraged to use initials or numbers for differentiation. This procedure is intended to decrease the offenders’ fears that the disclosure of undetected crimes will result in self-incrimination or re-investigation. It is noteworthy that program participants regularly indicate they feel sufficiently “protected” by this process, and that it allows them to more fully disclose their undetected criminal behaviors. Since the number of victims and offenses recorded on the PHQ are based solely on the offender’s self-report, the results presented in this study may be underestimates or overestimates of the actual number of victims and offenses. Following data collection, we compared the number of known hands-on victims documented in the PSIR and the number disclosed to SOTP staff following at least 6 months of treatment.

Crossover Behavior Victim characteristics were obtained from the PSIR as well as the PHQ. Victims were organized according to gender and the following age “bands”: 1) birth to 2 years, 2) 3 to 6 years, 3) 7 to 11 years, 4) 12 to 17 years, and 5) 18 years and older. We examined crossover behavior by calculating the proportion of offenders with victims in each gender and age category.

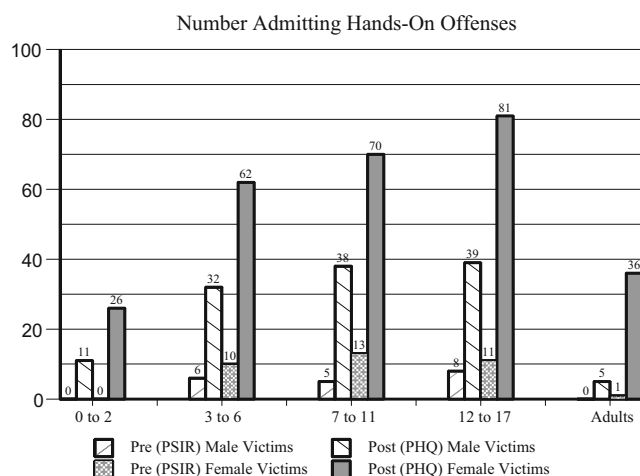


Fig. 1 Pre- and post-treatment disclosures of hands-on offenses

Results

Analyses of Contact Sexual Criminality

At the time of sentencing, 115 (74%) subjects had no documented hands-on victims. Forty (26%) had known histories of abusing a child via a hands-on sexual act (10 of these men had a prior substantiated finding of child sexual abuse by a child protective agency, 20 were convicted previously for a hands-on crime, and 22 admitted during interviews with investigators that they previously had engaged in hands-on abusive conduct)¹. Only one subject also had a documented history of criminal sexual conduct with an adult victim. The number of victims known at the time of sentencing was 75, or an average of 1.88 ($SD=1.88$) victims per offender.

By the end of treatment, 24 (15%) subjects denied they committed hands-on sexual abuse, and 131 subjects (85%) admitted they had at least one hands-on sexual offense, a 59% increase in the number of subjects with known hands-on offenses. The number of reported victims known at the end of treatment, among all offenders, was 1,777, an average of 13.56 ($SD=30.11$) victims per offender. A breakdown of these disclosures, by the age of the victims, is presented in Fig. 1.

When analyzed separately, we found that the 40 subjects who had known histories of hands-on sexual offending at the time of sentencing disclosed an average of 19.4 victims during their treatment period. In comparison, the 115 subjects with no known histories of these crimes ultimately disclosed an average of 8.7 victims.

¹ Note that the sum of these numbers is greater than 40 due to the fact that 12 men who admitted to investigators that they committed undetected hands-on offenses also had either previous convictions or confirmed incidents of abuse by a social service agency.

Crossover Analysis

Data from analyses of crossover behavior are presented in Table 1 and Fig. 2. Table 1 highlights the fact that a significant percentage of subjects in our sample crossed age bands and gender categories. Particularly noteworthy is the finding that offenders who reported having male victims were significantly more likely to engage in crossover behavior by gender when compared with subjects who reported abusing female victims. Similarly, Fig. 2 illustrates the percentage of offenders who engaged in crossover behavior according to their pre- and post-treatment disclosures. By the end of treatment, 67% of the admitted hands-on offenders ($n=131$) acknowledged abusing both pre-pubescent and post-pubescent children, a 47% increase from what was known at the time of sentencing. With respect to gender, the percentage of these offenders who admitted both male and female victims increased from 15% to 40%.

Among the offenders who did not have any known victims at the time of sentencing, 24% indicated during treatment that they had victimized children of both genders and 48% said they abused both pre-pubescent and post-pubescent victims. Note that these percentages differ from those presented in Fig. 2; the figure represents disclosures made by a combined sample of offenders with known hands-on offenses at the time of sentencing and those without.

Discussion

Of substantial importance is the current finding that a significant number of Internet sex offenders in our sample acknowledged committing acts of hands-on abuse. Their disclosures of these behaviors were facilitated by the

Table 1 Percentage of offenders who engage in crossover by gender

		Percentage with victims of both genders
Subjects with male victims	Pre-Pubescent (0–11) ($n=54$)	82%
	Post-Pubescent (12–17) ($n=39$)	67%
	Adult (18+) ($n=5$)	80%
Subjects with female victims	Pre-Pubescent (0–11) ($n=94$)	42%
	Post-Pubescent (12–17) ($n=81$)	44%
	Adult (18+) ($n=36$)	42%

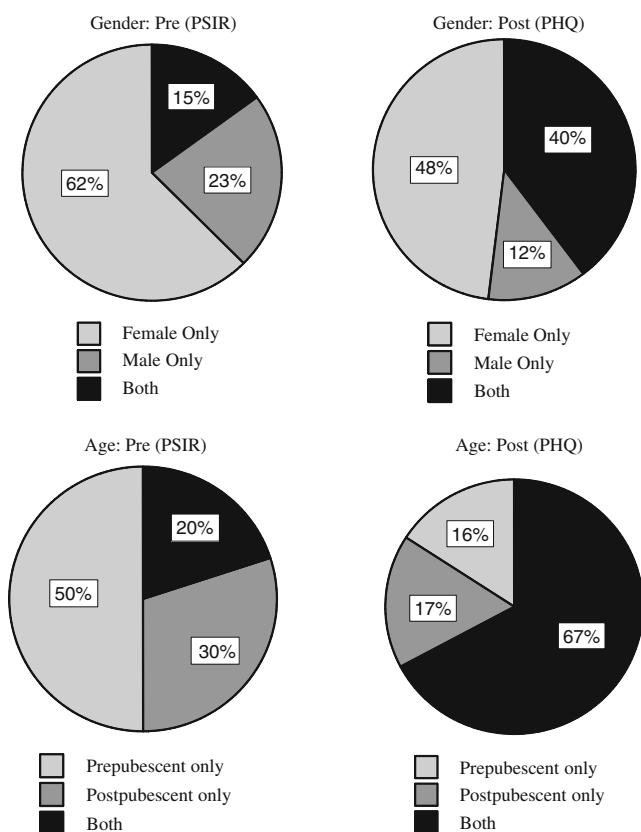


Fig. 2 Pre- and post-treatment crossover by age and gender

offenders' participation in the treatment program, and are consistent with disclosures made by other offenders in similar prison-based programs (see Ahlmeyer 2000). We believe that few, if any, of the offenders in our sample would have admitted the true extent of their sexual offense histories if they had not participated in an intensive treatment program. The findings of this study underscore the importance of prison-based sex offender treatment by enhancing the accuracy of risk appraisals, which ultimately improve the management of offenders in the community.

The dramatic increase (2,369%) in the number of contact sexual offenses acknowledged by the treatment participants challenges the often-repeated assertion that child pornography offenders are "only" involved with "pictures." It appears that these offenders are far from being innocent, sexually "curious" men who, through naivete or dumb luck, became entangled in the World Wide Web. In fact, of the 24 subjects in our sample who denied they committed a hands-on offense at the end of treatment, nine were polygraphed, and only two "passed." In other words, less than 2% of subjects who entered treatment without known hands-on offenses were verified to be "just pictures" cases. It is noteworthy that both of these offenders remarked that while they had not molested a child prior to their arrest for the instant offense, with access and opportunity they would

have been at risk for engaging in hands-on molestation. Thus, with 85% of the sample being admitted child abusers, and with less than 2% of polygraphed subjects confirmed as "just pictures" offenders, this and other studies (Hernandez 2000; Wolak et al. 2005) call into question whether it is pragmatically, not to mention theoretically, useful to discriminate between "child pornographers" and "child abusers" or even "pedophiles" (see Seto et al. 2006).

Consistent with the literature in this area (e.g., Hanson and Bussiere 1998), we found that subjects with known prior sexual crimes offended at a higher rate than those who did not have such histories. In our sample, those with documented hands-on sexual offenses at the time of sentencing disclosed more than twice as many victims (19.4 victims per offender) than those whose prior hands-on crimes had gone undetected (8.7 victims per offender).

While the primary findings of this study indicate that the majority of so-called child pornographers in our sample are, in fact, undetected child abusers, the results also highlight the phenomenon of "crossover." Specifically, we found that a significant number of offenders engaged in the abuse of children of both genders and in more than one age band. Of the subjects in our sample, nearly two-thirds admitted during treatment that they had abused both pre-pubescent and post-pubescent victims, an increase of 52% from what was known prior to sentencing. Similarly, the percentage of these subjects who acknowledged abusing children of both genders increased by 25%. These figures are similar to those reported by other authors (e.g., Ahlmeyer et al. 2000; English et al. 2000).

While we concede the possibility that some individuals who download and view child pornography may not experience certain negative effects (e.g., reinforcement of pedophilic arousal patterns, desensitization to the harm inflicted upon the victims, behavioral disinhibition), we have not encountered such individuals in our clinical practice. In our work with these offenders, we have found that exposure to child pornography, as well as the cultural and technological context in which it is exchanged, has an insidiously deleterious effect on them. It normalizes child/adult sexuality, dehumanizes children, and desensitizes the offender to the harmful consequences of child victimization. These effects are further exacerbated by the offender's immersion in cyber-communities of similarly socially marginalized and sexually deviant individuals. These online communities not only serve as online "trading posts" for illicit material, they also provide social validation, a sense of belonging, and support. For the majority of subjects in our sample, their involvement in child pornography crimes appears to have been an adjunctive behavior. That is, their collecting and trading behaviors were simply behavioral manifestations of a larger, more pervasive, and enduring paraphilic lifestyle.

Prior to their arrest, many of our subjects led seemingly normal and law-abiding lives. For them, the illusion of anonymity provided by the Internet was fertile ground for the awakening of dormant (or successfully suppressed) sexual fantasies. For others, as noted above, the exchange of child abuse images and stories about child–adult sex, as well as online sexual solicitation of children, were adjunctive behaviors in the life of a criminal paraphile. While our study does not address the questions of how, and under what circumstances, exposure to Internet child pornography affects individuals, based on the current findings it seems presumptuous to conclude that the Internet is a causal factor in contact sexual criminality. The vast majority of the participants in our treatment program report that they committed acts of hands-on abuse *prior* to seeking child pornography via the Internet. By making this observation we do not intend to imply that there is no relationship between viewing child pornography and contact sexual crimes. In fact, we believe that there exists a complex and reciprocal interaction. However, given the paucity of empirical research in this area, it is premature to define the relationship parameters at this time.

We anticipate the question, “What motivated so many offenders in this sample to disclose their hands-on offenses?” There are several possible answers to this question, but we believe they are influenced by the following interacting variables: 1) treatment occurs in a therapeutic milieu that emphasizes complete disclosure of offenders’ sexual offense histories, 2) safeguards are in place to allow disclosure to occur without self-incrimination, 3) all disclosures are made post-conviction and post-sentencing, and 4) treatment program participants are held accountable to their disclosures through our polygraph program. We should note that the process of disclosure is gradual and lengthy, and it occurs in the context of a positive therapeutic relationship. Seldom does an offender provide a complete disclosure of his history upon admission to the program. Over time, however, he begins to trust his therapist and, consequently, learns to overcome the pronounced shame and embarrassment that usually inhibit full disclosure. He begins to disclose his entire sexual offending history only after he sees the value of purging himself of the lies and deceit that have pervaded his life. Put simply, after years of deception, the offender begins to understand the implicit value of telling the truth.

There are several limitations of the current study. First, all of the current subjects volunteered for sex offender treatment. It is unknown whether, or in what manner, child pornographers who self-select for treatment differ from offenders with similar offenses who decline to participate in such treatment programs. It is possible that those who volunteer for treatment could be the most prolific offenders who are motivated to seek help because they recognize they

have significant treatment needs (i.e., numerous victims). Alternatively, the opposite could be argued: those who refuse treatment may be the more prolific abusers. Although their reasons for refusing treatment may vary, this group would include those offenders for whom such offenses are ego-syntonic, those who believe they have been cured since their arrest, those with significant psychopathic traits, and those with entrenched distorted belief systems (e.g., those who believe that sexual activity between adults and children is healthy and natural).

It has been suggested that offenders who receive treatment in inpatient or correctional settings may over-report their crimes to “look good in treatment” or to “look good for the parole board.” The empirical evidence, however, suggests that offenders often under-report their actual criminal histories (Abel et al. 1987; Ahlmeyer et al. 2000; Kaplan 1985). Also, the parole system was eliminated from the federal system nearly 20 years ago; as a result, the majority of Internet offenders in federal custody are not parole eligible. Thus, each inmate in our treatment program was released at the end of a determinate sentence, regardless of how many offenses he disclosed. Further, approximately one-half of the inmates in the current sample were polygraphed regarding the veracity of their sexual histories. The polygraph examinations assessed both under- and over-reporting, and there was no evidence of over-reporting with any subject.

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that online criminal investigations, while targeting so-called “Internet sex offenders,” likely have resulted in the apprehension of concomitant child molesters. In fact, if it had not been for their online criminality, these offenders may not otherwise have come to the attention of law enforcement. Upon being discovered, these offenders tend to minimize their behavior. They may attribute their search for child pornography to “curiosity” or a similar benign motivation. They may “accept responsibility” only for those behaviors that are already known to law enforcement, but hide any contact sexual crimes to avoid prosecution for these offenses, or to avoid the shame and humiliation that would result from revealing their deviance to family, friends, and community. Only later do the majority of sex offenders who enter treatment acknowledge that they were not, as they initially claimed, merely interested in sexual *images* involving children; they were (and are) sexually aroused by children.

Further, as prior research and our current findings suggest, it appears that the manifestations of their deviant sexual arousal was not limited to fantasy. Rather, when an opportunity arose (either incidentally or as a result of

planned, predatory efforts), many offenders molested or raped children, and engaged in a variety of other sexually deviant behaviors. The fact that many of these offenders reported committing undetected contact sexual crimes raises the question of whether the advent of the Internet has created a new type of sex offender, or if it merely provides additional outlets for sexually deviant individuals. In other words, are we faced with a new type of *offender*, or a new type of *offending*? Results of this study suggest the latter; that is, that many Internet child pornography offenders may be undetected child molesters, and that their use of child pornography is indicative of their paraphilic orientation.

While it is indisputable that certain factors (e.g., psychiatric disorders, developmental and psychological vulnerabilities) influence criminality, the influence of these factors on child pornography offenders is unknown. Therefore, we urge clinicians to be cautious when attempting to describe a causal relationship between online sexual criminality and any other factor. Further, we strongly recommend against the formation of new (and sometimes tautological) psychological constructs to explain this phenomenon (e.g., “cyberpictophilia”). Along similar lines, we urge professionals to use restraint and avoid attributing the pathogenesis of certain problematic sexual behavior involving the Internet, such as cybersex “addiction” (see Schneider 1994) or online compulsive sexual behavior (see Delmonico et al. 2002) to child pornography offenses. These constructs, while descriptive of certain problematic sexual behavior involving the Internet, do not, we believe, fully capture the psychological or behavioral complexities of child pornography offending.

From a context of risk assessment and management, the importance of etiology cannot be overstated. We believe there are discrete etiological or motivational pathways that underlie crimes involving the possession, distribution, and production of child pornography. While a discussion of these pathways is beyond the scope of this paper, the current authors intend to expound on this subject in future publications. We recommend that future studies address several issues, including (1) the relationship between deviant sexuality and the Internet, (2) issues pertaining to offender typology, (3) risk prediction, (4) differences between subjects who volunteer for treatment and those who do not, and (5) the effects of polygraph on disclosures. Ideally, future research designs should include appropriate comparison groups to control for volunteerism and to increase the representativeness of the sample.

While this study is exploratory, the results offer evidence regarding the scope and complexity of problems relating to sexual deviance and the Internet. They highlight the fact that the relationship between viewing child pornography and contact sexual criminality is a complex interaction.

While it is premature to define the relationship parameters at this time, future research should focus on clarifying these issues. We hope that the findings will spark an interest in the scientific community and encourage additional studies in this area, and we encourage replication in other correctional systems or treatment settings to expand the generalizability of these findings.

Acknowledgments The authors wish to thank R. Harmon for his assistance with data collection and data entry.

References

- Abel, G. G., Becker, J. V., Mittleman, M. S., Cunningham-Rathner, J., Rouleau, J. L., & Murphy, W. D. (1987). Self-reported sex crimes of nonincarcerated paraphiliacs. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2, 3–25.
- Abel, G. G., & Harlow, N. (2001). *The stop child molestation book*. Xlibris: www.xlibris.com.
- Abel, G. G., Gore, D. K., Holland, C. L., Camp, N., Becker, J. V., & Cunningham-Rathner, J. (1989). The measurement of cognitive distortions of child molesters. *Annals of Sex Research*, 2, 135–153.
- Abel, G. G., Mittleman, M. S., & Becker, J. V. (1985). Sex offenders: Results of assessment and recommendations for treatment. In M. H. Ben-Aron, S. I. Hucker, & C. D. Webster (Eds.), *Clinical criminology: The assessment and treatment of criminal behavior* (pp. 191–205). Toronto: M & M Graphics.
- Ahlmeier, S., Heil, P., McKee, B., & English, K. (2000). The impact of polygraphy on admissions of victims in adult sex offenders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 12, 123–138.
- Bumby, K. M. (1996). Assessing the cognitive distortions of child molesters and rapists: Development and validation of the MOLEST and RAPE scales. *Sexual Abuse*, 8, 37–54.
- Carich, M. S., & Calder, M. C. (2003). *Contemporary treatment of adult male sex offenders*. Lyme Regis, Dorset: Russell House.
- Cooper, A., Delmonico, D. L., & Burg, R. (2000). Cybersex. Users, abusers and compulsives: new findings and implications. *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 7, 5–29.
- Delmonico, D. L., Griffin, E. J., & Carnes, P. J. (2002). Treating online compulsive sexual behavior: When cybersex becomes the drug of choice. In A. Cooper (Ed.), *Sex & the Internet: A guidebook for clinicians* (pp. 147–167). New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Durkin, K. (1997). Misuse of the Internet by paedophiles: implications for law enforcement and probation practice. *Federal Probation*, 61, 14–18.
- Durkin, K., & Bryant, C. (1999). Propagandizing pederasty: a thematic analysis of the online exculpatory accounts of unrepentant paedophiles. *Deviant Behavior: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 20, 103–127.
- English, K., Jones, L., Pasini-Hill, D., Patrick, D., & Cooley-Towell, S. (2000). The value of polygraph testing in sex offender management: Research report submitted to the National Institute of Justice. Obtained on August 15, 2006 from <http://www.ncjrs.gov>.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (January 24, 2006). *Online pornography/child sexual exploitation investigations: Innocent Images National Initiative*. Obtained on June 12, 2006 from <http://www.fbi.gov>.
- Galbreath, N. W., Berlin, F. S., & Sawyer, D. (2002). Paraphilias and the Internet. In A. Cooper (Ed.), *Sex & the internet: A guidebook for clinicians* (pp. 187–205). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

- Heil, P., Ahlmeyer, S., & Simons, D. (2003). Crossover sexual offenses. *Sexual Abuse: Journal of Research and Treatment*, 15, 221–236.
- Hanson, R. K., & Bussiere, M. T. (1998). Predicting relapse: a meta-analysis of sexual offender recidivism studies. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66, 348–363.
- Hernandez, A. (2000). *Self-reported contact sexual offenses by participants in the federal bureau of prisons' sex offender treatment program: implications for internet sex offenders*. San Diego, CA: Poster session presented at the 19th Annual Research and Treatment Conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers November.
- Kaplan, M. S. (1985). *The impact of parolees' perceptions of confidentiality on the reporting of their urges to interact sexually with children*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, New York City.
- Lanning, K., & Burgess, A. W. (1989). Child pornography and sex rings. In D. Zillman, & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Pornography: Research advances and policy considerations*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- McCabe, K. (2000). Child pornography and the Internet. *Social Science Computer Review*, 18, 73–76.
- Quinsey, V. L. (1986). Men who have sex with children. In D. N. Weisstub (Ed.), *Law and mental health: International perspectives: Vol. 2* (pp. 140–172). New York: Pergamon.
- Sexual exploitation of children over the internet: What parents, kids, and congress need to know about child predators: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, 109th Cong., 2d Sess. (2006) (testimony of Ernie Allen).
- Seto, M., Cantor, J., & Blanchard, R. (2006). Child pornography offenses are a valid diagnostic indicator of pedophilia. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 115(3), 610–615.
- Schneider, J. P. (1994). Sex addiction: controversy within mainstream addiction medicine, diagnosis based on DSM-III-R and physician case histories. *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity: Journal of Treatment and Prevention*, 1, 19–44.
- Taylor, M., & Quayle, E. (2003). *Child pornography: An Internet crime*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Ward, T., Hudson, S. M., & Marshall, W. L. (1995). Cognitive distortions and affective deficits in sex offenders: a cognitive deconstructionist interpretation. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 7, 67–83.
- Wolak, J. D., Finkelhor, D., & Mitchell, K. (2004). Internet-initiated sex crimes against minors: implications for prevention based on findings from a national study. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 35, 424 e11–424.e20.
- Wolak, J., Finkelhor, D., & Mitchell, K. J. (2005). *Child-pornography possessors arrested in Internet-related crimes*. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Obtained on July 31, 2006 from <http://www.missingkids.com>.